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The Winters of North-Central Iowa.

BY HOWARD CLARK BROWN.

To the Iowan whose loss of perfect reason has driven him to California, the escape from the Iowa winter is accounted his greatest blessing. Few, indeed, of those who have formerly lived in Iowa ever consider a trip back to the prairie state in winter. It is the cold, the below zero weather, the snow drifts which they have desired to get away from. And yet all people are not so anxious. There is a strain of Iowans, often having sturdy Scotch blood in their veins, and almost certainly have they come from Canada in their journey to the States, there is such a strain which delights in the cold weather. The coldness adds vigor to their pursuits of life's varied interests. The thermometer at twenty below is only a sign for more eager greeting when once again the sun shines warm over the rolling plains as the Spring breaks upon the country. Often these persons who delight in the cold winters of Iowa have been pioneers in this Middle Western region. They have watched the stretch of plains change from a great treeless tract of loneliness to a region rich with ripening grains, dotted with human habitations, and interspersed with clustered communities.

Just such a pioneer, is Mrs. Eliza Cairns of Charles City, Iowa. Mrs. Cairns reached the Iowa prairie in December, 1858. Her brother, John Brown reached Bradford, the home of the Little Brown Church, in 1855. Both of these people delighted in recalling the oldtime, pioneer days. And a large number of their recollections clustered about the relentless Iowa winters. I think that we of to-day, often hearing the tales of the cold of other times, do not fully realize the fact of the latter. I was interested in probing the subject of former winters to its depth. I spent many afternoons and many long evenings listening to the tales of the pioneer as either Mrs. Cairns or my grandfather would give them to me. And though often these tales contained much hardship, much struggle, yet seldom was there any bitterness in the telling.

It is idle to try to assert that the weather of old times was more severe than it is to-day. A change of fifty years would make so little difference that human records would not denote it. The difference, after all, is in the conditions of life, and not in the change of the temperature. Life of to-day is fortified against the extreme weather of the winter season. Life of fifty years ago was open to

attack. Men are now amassed in communities. Tree rows temper the stinging gales which formerly swept, unchecked, across the prairie. But it is of interest to go back to those old times, to gather up fragments of the old pioneer life, to piece them together, and to interpret them in the light of the world of to-day. And to do this we must consult the old records of the people who then struggled in bitter opposition, against the elements.

In seeking records of the old times, I came first of all to the diary which Mrs. Cairns has kept. It is a record going back for more than half a century. A record of climate, of fall ploughings, of spring sowings, of summer harvests, in fact, a life record of many seasons, repeating itself again and again as life always does, yet adding, presenting greater possibilities, making the whole richer, more lovely than it was at any preceding year. The exceedingly mild winter of 1918-19, in North-Central Iowa might well be compared with the winter of 1854-55. That winter was so very mild that Mrs. John Kellogg of Charles City, (then St. Charles), hatched and raised chickens in December. A friend of my grandfather's, who had come to this part of the country in that year, wrote to him in Canada that the winters were very mild in Iowa. He said that he had chopped wood in his shirt sleeves all winter. The next spring, Mr. Brown set out for Iowa. And, in accordance with his friend's description of the climate, he thought it unnecessary to bring his overcoat. The first winter he was here, 1855-56, it became so very cold that all of the thermometers of that time failed to register the temperature. All of them froze up. On one particular day no one was found in the cabin at which grandfather was staying, who would volunteer to go out after wood. But he, with true pioneer pluck, went out, alone. He had sent for his overcoat, in the meantime, but it had to come from McGregor by wagon, and on the way it was lost off the load. The owner never received it until sometime in January.

In 1876 Mrs. Cairns recorded that it was cloudy on December 25th, and that "roads were in a terrible condition of mud." December 28th of this same year found men ploughing.

Christmas day of 1884 was a splendid day with no snow at all, and roads were dusty in places. On the 27th of that year there was considerable rain. It had been cold before these dates, however, for we find that on December 3rd, the roads were good, and dry. On December 4th, it was quite cold, snowy, and blowing. Then, on

December 15th, it is recorded that some were running sleighs. However, the snow disappeared entirely before Christmas time.

It was at about this same time that a terrible winter struck this middle Western region. I have little left to record that season, save a short sketch which had to do with another Grandfather, Donald George Clark. Mr. Clark had been to Dubuque on the jury and was returning home upon an especially cold winter night. He left Charles City, walking toward his farm, some six miles to the South-west. The thermometer stood at thirty-eight below zero, yet he footed it all the way. He said that he had to run from one grove to the next to keep from freezing. A terrible wind swept across the prairies. And those who awaited him at home said that he looked like a snowman when he arrived.

The deep snow fall of 1877 has been recorded by Mr. Fred Strong of Charles City. There was a sixteen inch snow fall in Floyd County in November of that year. The whole disappeared within a month, however, and no other fell during that winter. It is not hard to believe that fences would easily be buried when such falls appeared. Many children of those days remember walking across the fields, over fences, on their way to school. The only care needed was in not breaking through the crust.

December 23rd, 1886 was stormy and roads were drifting badly according to the record of Mrs. Cairns.

January 15, 1888 was very cold. The thermometer registered forty below. On December 25th of that year, the ground was all bare, and the roads were dusty. The first snow of the season came on December 26th.

On December 25th, 1889 there was no snow and the recorder writes that it is more like April than December.

In 1895 there was sleighing on that same date. 1898 was somewhat similar, and Christmas day was made merry with sleighs.

In 1904 the ground was covered with snow on January first, but not enough was present for sleighing, as there was much dust mixed with the snow. On January 3rd of the same year, it was thirty below.

The years since 1904 have been rather uneven; we have had some which brought considerable snow, and some which brought little. Some were cold and some moderate, but the most moderate of all was that of 1918-19. The year just preceding had been an exceptional one in many parts of the country for heavy snows. Blizzards,

the old-fashioned three day sort which we thought had gone forever visited Iowa again. The weather was not so cold, but the blizzards were blinding. They blocked the way of any sort of traffic. Farmers were shut in for some time. But it was not as in the old days, for there was, with most of the farmers at least, some sort of communication with the outside world. It was not long at a time that the telephones were out of order, and even if they were not usable for short periods, at least, the nearest farm was usually a few rods away. It was far different from the case with my grandparents who found only three houses between their home, more than twelve miles distant from St. Charles, and the little village. But since we are told that exceptions prove the rule, so it is in this case. For the winter of 1918-19 was certainly an exception.

In November, 1918, on the first day of the month, an American bittern was seen by the writer, in Willow Pond Bird Sanctuary, at Charles City, Iowa. On that same day, a Wilson's snipe was also seen there. The snipe was again seen on November 3rd, near the same region. And in some bushes along the creek which goes from this sanctuary to the river, a male indigo bunting was seen. This is a most unusual record for the bunting, and I believe that the snipe and the bittern are quite out of season. Of course, since the creek was not frozen, the bittern and snipe could get their necessary foods. But why the bunting should have been around is another question. The weather had been mild, indeed, yet buntings had never remained in that region in former years at all as late as that date. Had it been the only eccentricity of that season I should have thought that something was the matter with the bird, and that it could not fly. But it was very active, flew well, and seemed thoroughly alert. Besides, the other birds having lingered so long past their usual times for migration made me believe that the season was truly to be one of considerable mildness.

In November, Mahlon Palmer, a member of the Califor Naturalist Club of Charles City, found violets in bloom. On the fourteenth of that month, in Brackett's Woods, a favored wood on an old river flood plain, and only a short distance from the town, I found baby-faces, (*Anemonella thalictroides*), coming up. However, I did not find any in blossom, as I had once before in the late fall when the frost had come very early, and then warm weather had followed closely upon it. There were other signs of reawakening life, for the buds of the lilacs were greatly swollen at this time and

were about to burst in some instances. And the gardens bore unmistakable signs of the retarded frosts.

On November 13th, 1918, Mrs. Fannie Kellogg of Charles City picked enough strawberries for a good sized dish. On December 24th, Mrs. Dutton picked cress in the garden for Christmas dinner. Mrs. H. Blunt gathered beets from the garden at this same time, and she had Johnny-jumpups in bloom. Is this not, verily, a repetition of that old winter of 1854, when men chopped wood all winter long in their shirt sleeves? So it seemed indeed. But one of the greatest notes of mildness was yet due.

On December 17th, in a creek on the Floyd Road, the writer found a frog which wiggled rather inactively away, when touched. It was in the bottom of the stream when first seen, and minnows were swimming around in the water. But when the frog was moved, it continued its journey, proving that it had not yet reached the hibernation period.

The final triumph of the season, however, was the glad chirp of a robin on December 24th. Mr. Clement L. Webster of Charles City, states that robins have been known to remain throughout the winter occasionally, when a hollow along the river offered protection from the winter winds, and when some human hand would offer them food and a crude sort of shelter. But he had no instances in late years of any remaining under any conditions. I had never before seen a robin at this season in this locality. It was a novel and joyful experience when I was summoned by telephone to the neighborhood in which the robin had been seen. It was hovering around the back porches, trying to hop in the gravelly parts underneath the porches, where there was none of the snow. When a person passed too near, however, it took to the top of some of the tall hard maples along the street. Some attempts were made to scatter food for it, but whether it ate any of the offered crumbs I can not say. Just the year before, in a wood North of town, another bird enthusiast and myself had discovered some red headed woodpeckers which were wintering with us. That was the first time during the years which we had tramped that region, at which we had ever seen the red-heads in winter. They had stored acorns in holes of their own making, in an old stump. We discovered them at their lunch counter. But now a robin was found and in the dead of winter. We began to think that Nature knew no laws at all. Whether this was a robin which had not yet migrated and

would do so later, or whether it was to remain with us all winter is not known, as I had no record for it since that date. It had been seen quite commonly in that neighborhood until the snow on the twenty-fourth. The fact that it could fly well had been definitely demonstrated again and again.

I am glad that this mild sort of winter arrived at a time when I was about to help record some of the strangenesses of it. The weather bureau took temperatures and some of the street seers noted the late open condition of the river, but the fragments which I gathered were from the fields and woods and would else have remained unnoticed. Of course, I do not think that such notes have great value, but I believe that they are very interesting, and that in such comparisons, and such only, do we come to an appreciation of what early times were like. I am truly very grateful for that record which Mrs. Cairns has kept. It is a life record of changing seasons, of storms and quiet. Through its pages the kettle drums of the prairie blizzards howl, the coyote's lonely cries are echoed in the lonely stillness of the night, the snow cracks as the crust breaks with the fleeing deer, and thus the winter goes on. The winter,—season of hunger and of want, season of cold and much misery, yet the season when men's souls are tried and tempered into the finest steel.

Birds Observed at Rum Village on October 7, 1920

BY BROTHER ALPHONSUS, C. S. C.

The day was fine. We left Notre Dame at 8.45 a. m. and arrived at the large grove that is still called Rum Village, from an old Indian settlement, at 9:30 a. m. This piece of timber is perhaps the largest and finest in the immediate vicinity of South Bend, Indiana. The city has recently purchased a portion of the grove, but the larger part is still in private hands and seemingly will soon be levelled to the ground. Already there are large clearings in it, and here and there wretched hovels have been set up. If the entire wood was bought by the city, it would make one of the finest parks in the country.

Just after we got into the grove, we discovered one pine warbler, two downy woodpeckers, and a white-breasted nuthatch. This was the only pine warbler we found, although myrtle warblers were